

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A telephone system for allowing access to both a telephone network and a computer communication network, said telephone system comprising:

5 a telephone line signal processing section adapted to be connected with a telephone network to achieve voice communication via said telephone network;

10 a telephonic function section including a voice input section, a voice output section, an input key section, and an on-hook/off-hook operation section;

a VoIP engine section adapted to be connected with a computer communication network to achieve voice communication via said computer communication network;

15 a switching section for switchingly connecting said telephonic function section with either one of said telephone line signal processing section and said VoIP engine section; and

20 a control section for generating a signal for controlling said switching section such that when a first condition is satisfied in respect of each state of said input key section and said on-hook/off-hook operation section, said telephonic function section is connected with one of said telephone line signal processing section and said computer communication network, and when a second condition is satisfied, said telephonic function section is connected with the other one of said telephone line signal processing section and said computer communication network.

25 2. A telephone system as defined in claim 1, said input key section includes a numeric key and a non-numeric key, wherein said first condition is defined by a term including the fact that a predetermined specific key provided from

said non-numeric key is operated in said input key section under an off-hook state in said on-hook/off-hook operation section, wherein when detecting that said first condition is satisfied, said control section is operable for said switching section to connect said telephonic function section with said computer communication network.

3. A telephone system as defined in claim 2, said numeric key includes 1 to 9-keys and 0-key, and said non-numeric key includes a #-key and a *-key, wherein said specific key is said #-key.

4. A telephone system as defined in claim 2 or 3, said second condition is defined by a term including the fact that any key other than said specific key is operated in the input key section under the off-hook state in said on-hook/off-hook operation section, wherein when detecting that said second condition is satisfied, said control section is operable for said switching section to connect said telephonic function section with said telephone network.

5. A telephone system for allowing access to both a telephone network and a computer communication network, in which a plurality of local communication networks are connected respectively with a wide-area computer communication network through a router and a first gateway, each of said local communication networks including at least one terminal unit connected therewith, each of said local communication networks being connected with a telephone network via a second gateway, wherein

each of said local communication networks includes a gatekeeper for opening either one of said first and second gateways to connect said terminal unit with either one of said wide-area computer communication network and said telephone network, said gatekeeper being adapted to open said first

gateway to connect said terminal unit with said wide-area computer communication network when a first condition is satisfied in respect to the state of an on-hook/off-hook operation section and an input key section of said terminal unit, and to open said second gateway to connect said terminal unit with said telephone network when a second condition is satisfied.

6. A telephone system as defined in claim 5, wherein said gatekeeper is adapted to determine which communication with a called end via said wide-area computer communication network or said telephone network provides lower cost, based on a key operated when said input key section is operated for a calling under an off-hook state of said on-hook/off-hook operation section of said terminal unit, so as to connect said terminal unit in said local communication network with said determined lower-cost one of said networks.

7. A telephone system as defined in claim 5, wherein said gatekeeper is adapted to determine that said first condition is satisfied, when said gatekeeper recognizes that said called end is located at a remote place, based on a key operated when said input key section is operated for making an outside call under the off-hook state of said on-hook/off-hook operation section of said terminal unit, so as to connect said terminal unit making said outside call with the local communication network close to the location of said called end via said wide-area computer communication network, wherein when said called end is the terminal unit connected with said local communication network, the gatekeeper of said local communication network close to the location of said called end is adapted to connect said outside call with said terminal, and when said called end is a telephone set connected with the outside telephone network, the gatekeeper of said local communication network close to the location of said called end is adapted to connect said

outside call with said outside telephone network.

8. A telephone system as defined in claim 7, wherein said outside call is an overseas call.

5 9. A voice-communication terminal unit comprising:

a telephone line signal processing section adapted to be connected with a telephone network to achieve voice communication via said telephone network;

10 a telephonic function section including a voice input section, a voice output section, an input key section, and an on-hook/off-hook operation section;

a VoIP engine section adapted to be connected with a computer communication network to achieve voice communication via said computer communication network; and

15 a switching section for switchingly connecting said telephonic function section with either one of said telephone line signal processing section and said VoIP engine section.

10. A voice-communication terminal unit comprising:

20 a voice signal input section;

a voice signal output section;

a VoIP engine section adapted to be connected with a computer communication network to achieve voice communication via said computer communication network; and

25 a receiver set including an input key section and allowing an on-hook/off-hook operation, wherein said receiver set is connected with said voice signal input section and said voice signal output section.

11. A telephone system comprising:

a telephone line signal processing section adapted to be connected with a telephone network to achieve voice communication via said telephone network;

5 a telephonic function section including a voice input section, a voice output section, an input key section, and an on-hook/off-hook operation section;

a VoIP engine section adapted to be connected with a computer communication network to achieve voice communication via said computer communication network;

10 a switching section for switchingly connecting said telephonic function section with either one of said telephone line signal processing section and said VoIP engine section; and

15 a cost determination section for determining which communication via said telephone network or said computer communication network provides lower cost, based on the operation of said input key section; and

20 a control section for generating a signal for controlling said switching section such that when it is determined that the communication via said telephone network provides lower cost, said telephonic function section is connected with said telephone line signal processing section, and when it is determined that the communication via said computer communication network provides lower cost, said telephonic function section is connected with said VoIP engine section.